

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of communicating with a remote service distribution system to obtain software to be installed in a local device, comprising:

at a computer associated with the local device, storing a data structure that defines hardware resources and software resources of the local device;

establishing communication with the remote service distribution system; and requesting a service from the remote service distribution system, the service including transmission of the software to the local device, wherein information of the data structure that defines the hardware resources and software resources of the local device is transmitted to the remote service distribution system.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the computer associated with the local device comprises a network appliance that operates as a gateway to the Internet for the local device.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein a follow-up service associated with the software is available from the remote service distribution system at a later time than the service, the method further comprising storing information at the computer specifying that the follow-up service is available.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the follow-up service comprises an upgrade of the software.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the follow-up service comprises an extension module of the software.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising reestablishing communication with the remote service distribution system at said later time based on the information specifying that the follow-up service is available such that the follow-up service can be provided to the local device.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein reestablishing communication is performed automatically and without user initiation thereof.

8. A service distribution system configured to interface with a remote device in order to provide services, the system comprising:

a network interface module configured to provide an interface to the remote device;

at least one service available to the remote device; and

a resource analysis module configured to analyze resources on the remote device in relation to the at least one service.

9. The service distribution system of claim 8, further comprising a storage device that stores software packages pertaining to the at least one service.

10. The service distribution system of claim 8, wherein the network interface module is an Internet interface that connects to the Internet and provides a public interface, wherein the public interface provides limited access to the service distribution system.

11. The service distribution system of claim 8, wherein the network interface module is an Internet interface that connects to the Internet and provides a private interface, wherein the private interface provides secure access to an outlet for purposes of uploading additional software to the service distribution system.

12. The service distribution system of claim 8, wherein the network interface module is connected to the Internet via a data connection.

13. The service distribution system of claim 8, wherein the at least one service includes both initial services and follow-up services, wherein initial services are performed immediately upon request and follow-up services are performed at a later time.

14. The service distribution system of claim 13, wherein the initial services include the ability to download software packages to operate on the remote device.

15. The service distribution system of claim 13, wherein the follow-up services include automatically updating an initial service on a remote device when an update to the initial service becomes available.

16. The service distribution system of claim 8, wherein the resource analysis module is configured to identify hardware resources available on the remote device, wherein the hardware resources are analyzed in relation to the at least one service to determine which services are compatible with the remote device.

17. The service distribution system of claim 8, wherein the resource analysis module is configured to identify software resources available on the remote device, wherein the software resources are analyzed in relation to the at least one service to determine which services would enhance the identified software resources.

18. A method for delivering services to a remote device through a service distribution system, comprising:

- establishing a connection with a remote device;
- identifying hardware resources on the remote device;
- displaying a list of available services that are compatible with the hardware resources on the remote device;
- receiving a request to perform at least one service including at least one initial service; and
- performing the at least one service.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising reestablishing a connection with the remote device and performing any requested follow-up services.

20. The method of claim 18, further comprising, if the hardware resources available on the remote device were not fully identified, prompting a user of the remote device to manually input the hardware resources available on the remote device.

21. The method of claim 18, wherein establishing a connection with a remote device further comprises providing a public interface that is publicly accessible over the Internet and establishing a connection with a remote device via the public interface.

22. The method of claim 18, wherein identifying the hardware resources available on the remote device further comprises accessing a data structure associated with remote device defining the hardware resources available on the remote device.

23. The method of claim 18, wherein displaying a list of available services that are compatible with the hardware resources available on the remote device further comprises analyzing available services in relation to the hardware resources available on the remote device.

24. The method of claim 18, wherein the request to perform at least one service is received at the service distribution system from the remote device via the Internet.

25. The method of claim 18, wherein performing the at least one initial service comprises transmitting at least one software package to the local device.

26. At a service distribution system, a method for suggesting enhancement services to a remote device, comprising:

establishing a connection with the remote device;

identifying resources available on the remote device;

analyzing resources available on the remote device in relation to services available on the service distribution system; and

displaying a list of services that would enhance the resources available on the remote device.

27. The method of claim 23, wherein establishing a connection with the remote device further includes providing an interface that is publicly accessible over the Internet and establishing a connection with a remote device via the interface.

28. The method of claim 23, wherein identifying hardware and software resources available on the remote device further includes the acts of:

analyzing whether the remote device has previously connected to the service distribution system;

if the remote device has previously connected to the service distribution system, identifying software resources available on the remote device and accessing a data structure including available hardware resources of the remote device; and

if the remote device has not previously connected to the service distribution system, identifying software and hardware resources available on the remote device by receiving information specifying the software and hardware resources from the remote device.

29. The method of claim 23, wherein analyzing the hardware and software resources available on the remote device in relation to a set of services available on the service distribution system further comprises eliminating services which would not be compatible with hardware resources available on the remote device and determining if any of the non-eliminated services would enhance software resources on the remote device.